

Bible Translation

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Miriam L. Hjälms*

The Changing Face of the Arabic Bible: Translation Techniques in Early Renditions of Ezekiel

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Abstract: This article presents a study of Ezekiel 1 in five unpublished Christian Arabic manuscripts dated from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. We will demonstrate that the manuscripts, in principal, represent two different versions. Both versions are based on the Syriac Peshitta but various degrees of influence from the Septuagint are evident. Our main aim is to examine the approach to translation exhibited in the manuscripts. In general, the earliest witness represents a literal translation which pays attention to structural affinity but allows for minor deviations, mainly omissions for the sake of the target language. In the younger manuscripts, an increasing number of additions are introduced as a means of commenting, clarifying and ornamenting the biblical narrative. It appears that texts in the traditional liturgical languages were still in use, which explains their non-literal and target-oriented character.

Keywords: Arabic; Ezekiel; Bible translation; Near Eastern Christians; sacred language

The origin of the Bible in Arabic is largely veiled to modern scholars. Some have argued that the Bible was translated into Arabic in pre-Islamic times, and thereby they question the status of the Qurʾān as the first extensive work composed in the Arabic tongue.¹ Based on the lack of reliable sources,² most scholars conclude that written translations of the Bible into Arabic do not appear until after the rise and spread of Islam.³ The most ancient renditions in our possession are datable to the dawn of the ninth century. As many of these manuscripts are copies of earlier texts, it is reasonable to assume that some biblical books, typically those used in liturgy, were available in the Arabic idiom at least in the eighth century. There was no systematic and successful attempt to authorize one single rendition of the Bible in Arabic. Instead, new translations or revisions of biblical books constantly appeared which led to a rich and multifaceted conglomerate of traditions and an ever-changing approach towards Bible translation among Near Eastern Christians.

¹ See in particular Baumstark, “Das Problem”, 562-75; idem, “Arabische Übersetzung”, 165-88; idem, “Eine Altarabische Evangelienübersetzung”, 201-209; Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, 435-43; idem, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 422-29. More recently, Kachouh has argued for a pre-Islamic origin of some Arabic Gospel translations, see especially the discussion concerning Ms Vat. Ar. 13, *The Arabic Versions*, 142-71.

² According to Michael the Syrian, the Miaphysite Patriarch of Antioch, John of Sedra (631-40), translated the four Gospels from Syriac into Arabic by the help of some Arab tribes who knew both Syriac and Arabic on behalf of Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. However, the story is of little credence, see Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 225-26. For early references to the Arabic Gospel, see Griffith, “The Gospel in Arabic”, 135-50.

³ Graf, *Geschichte*, 142-46; Vööbus, *Early Versions*, 271-97; Blau, “Sind uns Reste arabischer Bibelübersetzungen”, 67-72; and Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 18-23. The latter argues for the existence of oral Bible translations prior to written ones.

*Corresponding author: Miriam L. Hjälms, University of Munich, Germany, E-mail: mili1154@gmail.com

The translation endeavor of the Bible into Arabic has been known and studied for several centuries. Yet, most manuscript sources remain unexplored. This is especially true for the earliest renditions. The lack of interest in Arabic Bible translations is connected to the vast and heterogeneous material but also to the fact that Arabic translations are relatively late compositions, and, as secondary or even tertiary traditions, they are of little value for the study of the original Scriptures.⁴ Fortunately, interest in the use and understanding of the biblical texts in various communities and their relations to the adjacent milieu has intensified during the last decades.⁵

In the Arabic-speaking communities under Muslim rule, we find representatives from various Christian creeds: the *Rūm* Orthodox (Melkites) who are in communion with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Coptic and Syriac Orthodox miaphysites (Jacobites), Maronites and Mozarabs who are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Church of the East (Nestorians). In modern times we also encounter denominations who broke with the traditional Near Eastern Churches enumerated above and entered into communion with Rome: Melkites, Chaldeans, Syriac and Coptic Catholics. There are also various Protestant communities. Arabic translations of the Bible play an important role among all these communities. Nevertheless, in the present study we will concentrate on translations composed prior to the fifteenth century, i.e. before the invention of the printing press and before the extensive Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary activities to the East.

It appears that the Arabic texts figured in a dialectical relation to texts composed in the traditional liturgical languages (Greek, Latin, Syriac and Coptic), once the latter were no longer understood by ordinary people. Whereas the traditional liturgical language(s) became “sacred languages” which continued to convey Christian identity and safeguarded the religious heritage in its traditional form, Arabic translations were used to make the Christian faith understood and relevant for Near Eastern Christians.⁶ This function of the Arabic renditions allowed the translators to elaborate on the biblical narrative and use techniques that were suitable for their specific purposes. Whereas some texts are literal renditions, faithful even to formal aspects of the *Vorlage* such as syntactic constructions and sound-similarity, others add commentaries to the translated text or omit repetitive or what is considered pleonastic material in the biblical source text. Of special interest are the many additions that are incorporated into the biblical narrative. As will be demonstrated below, such additions may play an exegetical function or serve to make the text logical and coherent. They were apparently also used to elevate the status of the biblical literature in line with contemporary standards of literary Arabic.⁷ In such cases, the translation does not merely convey the eternal words of God but also improves its literary style and thereby its status.

Near Eastern Christians were aware of and had access to various biblical *Vorlagen*, primarily Syriac, Coptic, Latin, and Greek, which they sporadically consulted. Moreover, Arabic translations knew no confessional borders but were bought by or donated to various Christian and even Jewish communities.⁸ Thus, doctrinal aspects and liturgical use among different creeds, as well as various *Vorlagen* and translation principles, sometimes left their marks on the Arabic texts.⁹

Whereas some biblical books do not seem to have been translated into Arabic until the invention of the printing press, popular books such as the Gospels, the Epistles, the Psalms, the Pentateuch, Job, and Daniel,

⁴ Monferrer-Sala, “Plumbing the Depths”, 661-63. For the state of research on the Bible in Arabic see Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*, 3-21; and Kachouh, *The Arabic Versions*, 20-55.

⁵ See especially Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*; Kachouh, *The Arabic Versions*; and the books published in the recent Brill series *Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies*.

⁶ For a discussion on this dialectical relation and for a relevant bibliography, see Hjälms, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 9-22. The case was similar among Jews, see Polliack, “Arabic Bible Translations”, 128-37; idem, “Arabic Bible Translations in the Cairo Genizah”, 596-601; and Tobi, “Early Judeo-Arabic”, 225-35.

⁷ Cf. Kachouh, *The Arabic Versions*, 154n63; and Frank, “The Jeremias of Pethion”, 140.

⁸ Vollandt, “Coptic Hebraists”, 71-86.

⁹ For the influence of liturgical texts that replaced the original biblical wording, see Hjälms, “The Christian Arabic Book of Daniel”, 137-44.

existed in several versions already from the ninth and tenth centuries onwards.¹⁰ Among the most ancient Arabic translations of the Christian Old Testament, we find Ezekiel, Jeremiah (including Lamentations) and Daniel.¹¹ The former two were apparently not reproduced in the same number as Daniel. Around the sixteenth century when Arabic Bibles began to be printed, the Prophets were transmitted according to two major traditions: A Greek-based (“Alexandrian”) version and a Syriac-based (“Antiochean”) one. This was noted already by Brian Walton who oversaw the reprinting and partial revision of the Arabic sections in the so-called Paris Polyglot into what is known as the London Polyglot.¹² Carl Cornill studied the transmission of Ezekiel in various languages and confirmed what Walton had stated, namely that the Greek-based Arabic version was selected for the Polyglots and that minor parts missing in the Paris Polyglot were emended in the London Polyglot by the use of the Syriac-based Arabic version.¹³ Around thirty years later, Alberto Vaccari published two important articles on the Arabic Prophets.¹⁴ He contributed a list of several manuscripts to each of the two versions and argued that the name of the translator of the Greek-based version was al-‘Alam, a priest active around the tenth century. The earliest textual witness attested so far appears in the fourteenth century.¹⁵ Several scholars have examined specific books of al-‘Alam’s translation and demonstrated that it generally constitutes a literal representation of its Greek *Vorlage*.¹⁶ In the second article, Vaccari showed that the Syriac-based version was extant in several manuscripts and claimed that it represents the most widespread rendition of the Major Prophets, originally composed by a certain Pethiōn. The name Pethiōn is only explicitly connected with Jeremiah but similar versions of Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah are often transmitted as a block which gives the impression that they were composed by the same translator. Vaccari suggested that perhaps this Pethiōn was the one mentioned by the Muslim bibliographer al-Nadīm in *al-Fihrist* or someone else by that name who was active in the ninth century.¹⁷ However, as we will see below, the oldest extant manuscripts of Ezekiel do not transmit the version commonly attributed to Pethiōn but a different one. The authorship of Pethiōn has been described in more detail elsewhere.¹⁸ It is the aim of the present study to describe and analyze the two early versions of Ezekiel just mentioned, i.e. the one commonly attributed to Pethiōn and that found in the most ancient manuscripts, with an eye to translation trends. For this purpose, five unpublished manuscripts containing Ezekiel have been selected: Mss Sinai Arabic 1 dated to the ninth century (fols. 95a-148a); Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Fraser 257 (fols. 118a-163b) dated to around the eleventh century; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C. 58 Inf. (fols. 166b-234a) dated 1226; Sinai Arabic 9 dated to the thirteenth century (fols. 247b-329a); and London, British Library, Or. 5918 dated to the fourteenth century (fols. 117b-167a). It is clear that both versions are primarily based on the Peshittā, the standard Syriac Bible.

10 For Arabic renditions, see Kachouh, *The Arabic Versions*; of the Pentateuch, see Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*; of Job, see Blackburn, *The Early Arabic Versions of Job*; of Daniel, see Löfgren, *Studien*; and Hjältn, *Christian Arabic Versions*. Vevian Zaki is currently preparing an inventory on the renditions of the Pauline Epistles into Arabic as part of her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Munich.

11 For an account of the Prophets in Arabic, see Hjältn, “6-9-2-8 Arabic Translations.”

12 Walton (ed.), *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*. Another printed version, *the Biblia Sacra Arabica*, was issued for the benefit of the Near Eastern Churches, see Vaccari, “Una Bibbia”, 79-105; Féghali, “The Holy Books in Arabic”, 37-51; and Vollandt, “*Che portono*”, 401-18.

13 Cornill, *Das Buch*, 49-56. Cf. Walton (ed.), *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* vol. VI, § 15 in Praefatio (no pagination).

14 Vaccari, “Le versioni arabe dei profeti” (1921), 401-23; and “Le versioni arabe dei profeti” (1922), 401-23.

15 Vaccari, “Le versioni arabe dei profeti” (1921), 401-23; and Hjältn, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 40.

16 On the Greek version, see also Wald, “Übersetzung des Daniel”, 204-11; Reinke, *Zur Kritik*, 65-70; idem, *Der Prophet Haggai*, 34-37; Ryssel, “Die arabische Uebersetzung des Micha”, 102-38; Liebmann, “Der Text zu Jesaia”, 14-24; Gesenius, *Der Prophet Jesaia*, 97-106; Reynolds, “Al-Alam’s version of Zechariah”, 273-75; Löfgren, *Studien*, 34-49; Graf, *Geschichte*, 131-33; and Gehman, “The ‘Polyglot’ Arabic Text”, 327-52.

17 Following manuscripts contain this version: Milan, Biblioteca Ambros. C 58 inf. dated 1226; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Diez A fol. 41 dated 1325; London, BL, Or. 5918 dated to the 14th c.; Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, Or. 59 dated 1334; Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, 169 dated ca. 1625; Oxford, Bodl. Libr., Arch. Seld. A. 67 dated 1358/1458; Vatican, Ar. 495 and 503 dated to the 14th c., see Vaccari, “Le versioni arabe dei profeti” (1922), 401-408. Cf. Graf, *Geschichte*, 134; and Frank, “The Jeremias of Pethion”, 136-38. The latter two scholars likewise assumed that this translation represents one of the earliest rendition of the Bible into Arabic. The name Pethiōn is also connected with versions of Job and Ben Sira, see Frank, “The Jeremias of Pethion”, 136.

18 Hjältn, “The Major Prophets in Arabic.”

A Christian Bible in a Muslim Context

Before we turn to examine translation techniques, it is worthwhile to observe how Ezekiel is introduced in the various manuscripts. Here the proximity between the biblical composer, the translator and/or copyist and the reader or listener is commonly stressed. The biblical book is regularly introduced by an incipit briefly presenting the main character of the biblical narrative. The scribe then implores the biblical character to pray for him or asks God to bless the author, the translator or copyist and the reader alike.

Special interest should be paid to the invocations in the incipits since they provide us with information on how the Christian faith was commonly expressed in a language replete with Islamic connotations. Here the practice of the scribes differs. In Sinai Ar. 1 (fol. 95a), Ezekiel is introduced by the words *bism allāh ar-raḥman ar-raḥīm* [nubūwat Ḥazqiyāl an-nabīy] “In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. [The Prophecy of Ezekiel the Prophet]”. This formula, commonly referred to as the *basmallāh*, is exceedingly common in Muslim works and figures in all kinds of genres, from religious compositions to legal documents. As we have already observed, the use of the *basmallāh* was not confined to Muslim compositions and we find this formula in Jewish and Christian works as well.¹⁹ It appears that the *basmallāh* was commonly used in Bible translations composed in early Islamic times whereas a wider range, including more elaborate formulas, was introduced as Christian Arabic literature developed. Compare the introductory formula in Ms Oxford, Bodl., Fraser 257 (fol. 118a) which apparently was composed around the eleventh century: *bism allāh al-khāliq al-ḥayy an-nāṭiq* [nabdā bi-aydin rūḥ al-quḍus naktub tarjamat Ḥazqiyāl an-nabīy, ṣalawātuḥu ma’anā. Amīn] “In the name of God the Creator, the Living, the *Logikos*²⁰ (the Speaking/Rational). [By the Holy Spirit, we begin to write the translation of Ezekiel the Prophet. May his prayers be with us. Amen]”.²¹ The introductory formula “In the name of God the Creator, the Living, the *Logikos*” provides an interesting example where a Christian formula is adapted to the Muslim/Arabic-speaking milieu.²² Both *al-khāliq* and *al-ḥayy* are commonly listed among the 99 Muslim names of God (*asmā’ allāh al-ḥusnā*). Just like the other two names, *an-nāṭiq* is featured as an active participle. The Arabic root *ntq* has to do with speaking and rationality (compare Greek *logikos* “pertaining to speaking and/or logic”). The phrase also reflects the typically Christian formula “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” in that it alludes to the Trinitarian doctrine where God is one: “In the name of God”, yet three: “the Creator, the Living, the *Logikos*”. The fact that the three Persons, or *hypostases*, of the Trinity appear to be expressed through attributes is noteworthy. Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger have pointed out that according to the eleventh-century Arabic theologian ibn al-Faḍl, the common Trinitarian formula was not used by all the Fathers “but that some of them, left unnamed, defined the members of the Trinity in such ways as “the wise,” “the good,” and “the powerful,” or “the pre-eternal,” “the living,” and “the rational,” or even “the intellect,” “that which intellects” and “the intellect.”²³

However, the connection between the attributes and the Trinity should be taken with care, in our case, partly since we expect the order of “the Living” and “the Speaking” to be inverted but mainly since other Bible translations exhibit more than three active participles and so the attributes refer to the Trinity as such and not to its specific members. For instance, in Ms London, BL, Or. 5918 dated to the fourteenth century a more elaborate formula is used:²⁴

¹⁹ Almbldh, “The ‘Basmala’”, 45-60; Fleischer, “Beschreibung”, 586; Staal, *MT. Sinai Arabic*, 25; and Hjälms, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 80.

²⁰ Cf. Vollandt, “Making Quires Speak”, 203.

²¹ Compare the sixteenth-century Greek-based Ms London, BL, Or. 1326 fol. 2a where Ezekiel is also introduced by: *bism allāh al-khāliq al-ḥayy an-nāṭiq*.

²² Cf. Haddad, *La Trinité divine*, 187-245, see especially the scheme on 232-33.

²³ Noble and Treiger, “Christian Arabic Theology”, 388. In apologetic works we find similar expressions regarding God such as *al-mawjūd al-ḥayy an-nāṭiq* which “necessitates the affirmation of God’s existence, life and speech”, see Swansson, *Christian-Muslim Relations*.

²⁴ In Ms Sinai Ar. 9 dated to the thirteenth century we find a formula similar to that in Ms Sinai Ar. 1. In Ms Milan, Biblioteca Ambros. C 58 inf. dated 1226, the typically Christian invocation “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One God” is used.

بسم الله الأزلي الدائم الباقي الجواد العليم القادر الاله الواحد الرحمن الرحيم نبدا بتأييد الله وحسن توفيقه بنسخ
ترجمة كتاب نبوة خزيال النبي بن بوزي الحبر صلاته تحفظنا وبركاته [!] تكون معنا الأصحاح الأول

In the name of God, the Eternal, Everlasting, Ever Enduring, Generous giver, Omniscient, Omnipotent, the One God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, we begin by the support of God and the goodness of his approval to copy the translation of the book of the prophecy of Ezekiel the Prophet the son of Buzia the priest. May his prayers protect us and may his blessings be with us. The first chapter.

The incipit contains a range of attributes most of which are enumerated in lists of the 99 names of God in the Muslim tradition. As opposed to the previous example, it makes little sense to try to connect the various attributes with specific Persons in the Trinity. It is furthermore interesting to note that the copyist expressed his dependence on God for composing this text with the indirect consequence that the translation is authorized by God “we begin by the support of God and the goodness of his approval.” The question whether the translation was authorized by the Church, however, remains unanswered.²⁵ This translation was indeed widespread in Coptic and *Rūm* Orthodox communities. It is nevertheless doubtful whether it replaced the Greek and Syriac source texts as the standard text for two reasons. Firstly, this rendition was readily replaced with printed versions once available, such as the *Biblia Sacra Arabica* and revisions of it, and later by modern printed Bibles, most notably the Smith-van Dyke Bible. Thus, the Near Eastern communities apparently did not attach enough value to the rendition to defend it in the way the Greek Majority Text and the Syriac Peshiṭṭa have been defended. Secondly, it is unlikely that the composers intended this rendition to replace the traditional Bible version(s), given the many non-literal translation techniques employed in it, a subject to which we will now turn.

Structural Literalism or Improvement of the Biblical Style? An Overview of Translation Techniques

The Arabic renditions selected for the purpose of the present study are primarily based on the Syriac Peshiṭṭa. Thus, both source and target languages belong to the Semitic language family. Semitic languages share a large number of cognates and other kinds of sound-similar roots. In addition, their verb systems function in similar ways as do many other syntactic constructions. Thus, translations from one Semitic language into another can reach a high degree of structural affinity, should that be the aim. In other words, whereas all translations more or less can reflect the semantics of the source text, translations from one Semitic language to another can also reflect its form to an unusual extent. Two salient examples of structural literalism²⁶ are the Syriac version of Daniel in the Peshiṭṭa and the Jewish Karaite Yefet ben ‘Eli’s translation of this book into Arabic. Both these versions are based on a Masoretic text-type.²⁷ The Book of Daniel was extensively translated and copied during the Middle Ages and has survived in several different Arabic versions, some of which have been edited or studied carefully.²⁸ Thus, the Syriac and Arabic renditions of Daniel will serve as a useful introduction to various approaches to translation before we move on to the primary object of study, early Arabic renditions of Ezekiel.

The Aramaic rendition of Daniel 2:49 in the Masoretic text may literally be translated into English as “and Daniel asked the king *and he appointed* over the affairs of the province of Babylon Shadrakh, Meshakh and Abed-nego *and Daniel [was]* at the gate of the king”

²⁵ For preliminary thoughts how to understand different levels of authorization in Arabic Bible translations, see Hjälml, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 399-401.

²⁶ For the term ‘structural literalism’, see Polliack, “Alternate Renderings”, 210-11.

²⁷ For the *Vorlage* dependence of Daniel in the Peshiṭṭa, see Taylor, *The Peshiṭṭa of Daniel*. For Yefet’s translation of Daniel, see Margoliouth, *A Commentary*.

²⁸ See Margoliouth, *A Commentary*; Löfgren, *Studien*; Schlossberg, תפסיר; Stapleton, *An Edition*; Steiner, *A Biblical Translation*; and Hjälml, *Christian Arabic Versions*.

(וְדָנְיָאֵל בָּעָא מִן-מַלְכָּא וּמִנִּי עַל עֲבִידָתָא דִּי מְדִינַת בָּבֶל לְשַׁדְרָחַךְ מִישַׁח וְעֶבֶד נְגוֹ וְדָנְיָאֵל בְּתָרַע מַלְכָּא). With consideration taken to the wider syntactic and semantic context, the passage may also be rendered “Daniel asked the king *to appoint* Shadrakh, Meshakh and Abed-nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon *while* Daniel was at the gate of the king.” Thus, the first clause linkage does not represent a coordinated relation “and” but a subordinated one “that/to” and the second clause linkage expresses circumstance or contrast “while” or “but”. The time reference in the last clause is the same as that in the previous clauses and “was” may therefore be added in English. The Syriac version features mirror translations of the Aramaic clause linkages but introduces the conjugated verb *həwā* “was” in the final clause: “and Daniel asked the king *and* [wə] *he appointed* [...] *and* /while[wə] Daniel was [həwā] at the gate of the king.” As Syriac is closely related to biblical Aramaic there is of little surprise that the structure with few exceptions is mirrored. Yefet’s literal approach in his Arabic translations is more noteworthy. He translated the same passage into “and Daniel asked the king *until he appointed* [hattā wakkala...] *and/while* [wa] Dānyāl [was] at the gate of the king.”²⁹ Yefet used the particle *hattā* instead of *wa* “and” but preserved the perfect form of the verb, like in the source text, which gives the conjunction the meaning “until [he appointed].” He also preserved the subject-verb word order of the source text although in Arabic a verb-subject order would be more natural in this context.

In sum, the two translations examined above make small adjustments but on the whole both reflect the structure of the source text. Let us now turn to a Christian Arabic translation of Daniel preserved in Ms Sinai Ar. 2 dated 939/40 which is likewise based on the Masoretic text.³⁰ Here the same passage is rendered “and Daniel asked the king *to appoint* [an yalī] Shadrakh, Meshakh and Abed-nego over the province of Babylon *and he appointed them* [fa-walāhum] that and/while Daniel was [wa-kāna Dānyāl] at the gate of the king.” Similar to Yefet, a subordinating conjunction is selected between the first two clauses but instead of a verb in the perfect form, the imperfect is used with the meaning “to appoint.” As a confirmation of the action the same verb is then rendered again without proper translation equivalent, this time in the perfect form.³¹ The conjugated verb *kāna* is added in the final clause to establish its time reference. Thus, the Christian Arabic version reflects the sum of the non-literal renditions observed in the Syriac Peshiṭṭa and in Yefet’s translation and in addition it introduces some of its own. Besides the double rendition of the verb “appoint,” the source construction “the affairs of the province of Babylon” has been reduced from three to two nouns: “the province of Babylon.” It appears that whereas Yefet strived to attain structural affinity between source and target texts, the Christian Arabic translator was more concerned with the style of the Arabic text. The word order in Ms Sinai Ar. 2 adheres to the preferred verb-subject order of literary Arabic when no digression from the main story line is intended, and the word “the affairs” was seemingly perceived as unnecessary or even stylistically burdensome and therefore left out in the target text.³²

Yefet serves as an example of just how far some translators were willing to stretch the boundaries of literary Arabic in order to create a target text faithful also to the structure of the source text. With this in mind we will turn to the Arabic renditions of Ezekiel selected for the present study.

Early Christian Arabic Renditions of Ezekiel

As James Barr has pointed out, one should be careful not to classify a translation as ‘free’ or ‘literal’ in its entirety. Instead, we should examine a number of features and place each of them on a ‘free-literal’ scale.³³ Meira Polliack established a number of such features in her work on Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations which are useful also for Christian Arabic texts. In the present study, we will essentially use her typology and focus on omissions and additions in the target text and try to explain their purpose. To a lesser extent we will also discuss some lexical and syntactical aspects.³⁴ As indicated above, in translations from one

²⁹ Margoliouth, *A Commentary*, ۳۳.

³⁰ For a discussion of the unusual *Vorlage* dependence of this text, see Hjälml, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 92-103.

³¹ Cf. “Projection” in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 217-18.

³² For additional examples of similar kind, see Hjälml, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 197-98; 227-89.

³³ Barr, “The Typology of Literalism”, 279-94.

³⁴ Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 164-74; 208-241.

Semitic language into another, the terms formal equivalence (cf. structural literalism) on the one hand and semantic equivalence on the other may be especially useful. For instance, if the reference of an omitted element is still clear from the context, no semantic information is lost yet there is a structural discrepancy between source and target text. In a similar manner, additions may be added to the text to make explicit what is inferable from the syntactic or semantic context. Such extensions were most likely understood as enhancing the intended meaning of the source text, yet they deviate from its form.³⁵ Other kinds of additions are not implicit in the immediate structure of the source text and brought into the target text for exegetic or stylistic reasons.

We will now give a detailed account on the textual relation between the various manuscripts and on the main translation features identified in them. A sum of these findings will be presented in “Concluding remarks” along with a preliminary discussion of how to understand them.

The earliest rendition of Ezekiel into Arabic is transmitted in the ninth-century Ms Sinai Ar. 1 (henceforth Sin. Ar. 1). The first part of the text corresponding to Ez. 1:1-2a, is left out in the Arabic translation. However, its omission is not necessarily connected to translation techniques since these units could have been missing in the copy the translator used as a *Vorlage*. The description of Ezekiel as “the son of Buzi the priest” in Ez. 1:3 is also left out. In general however, omissions in this translation of Ezekiel 1 are confined to a word or two and they largely fall into two categories: repetitive information and information which is still inferable from the context.³⁶ For instance, in Ez. 1:4-5 the somewhat repetitive passage in the source text “and in it is like a vision in the fire *and in it* is an appearance of four animals *and these visions are like* an image of a man” is rendered in the Arabic target text as “and in it is like a vision within the fire and it resembles four animals: A likeness of a man”. In a similar manner, the source text passage in Ez. 1:10 “the appearance of *their faces is the face* of a man” is abbreviated into “and their faces is like a man” as to avoid the repetition of “faces” which is still inferable from the context. In 1:7 the specification of hoofs as hoofs of their feet is omitted so that the source passage “and the hoofs *of their feet* were like *the hoofs of* the calves” is rendered “and their hoofs are like the calves.” Redundant information is likewise dispensed with in Ez. 1:26 where “and like *a vision of* a precious stone” in the source text is rendered “like the precious stone” in the target text. Besides these two major categories of omissions, we encounter the omission of similar information³⁷ in Ez. 1:4 where the Syriac text unit “and a fire which was *flashing and* shining around it” is rendered “and a fire was shining around it”. Pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions may also be left out in the target text if such are still inferable from the overall context or result from minor syntactic reconstructions.

In sum, with few exceptions the omissions detected in Sin. Ar. 1 serve a stylistic function that aims at ridding the text of syntactically burdensome elements which may harm the fluidity of the target language. The semantic information of such passages is not lost since they are still inferable from the overall context.

Our next text that dates to around the eleventh century, Ms. Oxford, Bodl., Fraser 257, essentially represents the same text as that in Sin. Ar. 1. The textual affinity becomes especially evident from Ez.1:8 onwards. In the Oxford copy what appear to be copying mistakes in Sin. Ar. 1, such as the omission of Ez. 1:1-2a and arguably the missing description that Ezekiel is “the son of Buzi the priest” in Ez. 1:3, are represented. In Ez. 1:13 the Syriac text unit “and the image of the animals is *like the vision [ʾaḳ ḥezwā]* of burning coals in the fire” is rendered into “and the likeness of the animals is burning coals of fire” in Sin. Ar. 1. A more complete rendering is found in the Oxford copy “and the likeness of the animals is *like the likeness [mithl shabah]* of burning coals of fire.” Nevertheless, most of the minor omissions deliberately left out in Sin. Ar. 1 for the sake of style are also dispensed with in the Oxford manuscript. Moreover, several larger omissions are attested. There are substantial omissions in Ez. 1:8 and 1:13 which are interesting since

³⁵ See the chapter on cohesion in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 208-41.

³⁶ Hjälm, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 165-196; 197-98. Cf. Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 239-41.

³⁷ For this term, see Hjälm, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 198.

in these passages Sin. Ar. 1 also exhibits some irregularities.³⁸ Thus, it appears that text around Ez. 1:13-15 were missing in some copies of this tradition but that the copyist of Sin. Ar. 1 had access to another more complete text or translated these passages directly from a Syriac *Vorlage*. The reason for their occasional omission is likely related to the fact that Ez. 1:14 is excluded in the Septuagint. Text units missing in the Septuagint in Ez. 1:25-26 are also dispensed with in the Oxford copy.³⁹ Thus it is clear that the extant Syriac-based rendition was adjusted according to the Greek Septuagint (rather than to the Syrohexapla where such units are usually included). However, the adjustment was only partly executed. For instance, the rendition of Ez. 1:24 in the Peshiṭṭa “And I heard the sound of their wings *like the noise of great waters, and like the voice of God, when they went, and like the sound of speech in a [military] camp*” is simply rendered “And I heard the sound of their wings *when they went, as the sound of much water*” in the Septuagint. Whereas the text in Sin. Ar. 1 closely follows the Syriac rendition, that in the Oxford copy is brought in line with the Septuagint but leaves the last passage “and like the sound of speech in a [military] camp” as it is. Thus, the phrase “like the voice of the Almighty” is excluded. Besides being omitted in the Greek text, the omission of it may further be motivated by its anthropomorphic content, a common source of criticism by Muslim intellectuals.⁴⁰

Besides these passages we encounter a few other omissions of some length in the Oxford copy. Judged by their sporadic appearance and the fact that the logic of the text is somewhat affected by their exclusion,⁴¹ they seem to result from the copying process rather than from translation techniques.

Sin. Ar. 1 exhibits two intriguing additions. Compare Ez. 1:3 which in the Syriac Peshiṭṭa is rendered “the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel” with the Arabic translation “by *help of God* came a word from the Lord to *the mouth of* Ezekiel”. The text units “by help of” and “the mouth of” both enhance the idea that Ezekiel channeled the exact word of God. Similar expressions are found in the biblical corpus itself, but such phrasings also remind us of how Muhammad received God’s messages and may serve as a witness to how the biblical text was readily adjusted to its context. Besides these two extensions we encounter a few additions of single words in Sin. Ar. 1 that primarily serve to enhance the syntactical structure of the source text. The additions in Ez. 1:3 are not attested to in the Oxford manuscript and since substantial additions of this kind only occur in this single verse, it appears that they were not part of the original composition but added by the copyist of Sin. Ar. 1. On the contrary, addition techniques are frequently used in Ez. 1:1-7 in the Oxford manuscript. It seems therefore that at some point between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, parts of this version of Ezekiel were revised with a different approach to translation in mind. Representative examples occur already in the first verse in Ms Oxford, Bodl., Fraser 257 (additions are marked in italics):

In the thirtieth year, *after eighteen [years] had passed of king Josiah’s reign, Ezekiel prophesied*. In the fifth day of the fourth month I was among the captives by the river ḥeyyar, *says Ezekiel the Prophet*. The heavens were opened, and I saw a *stunning sight: a vision was revealed to me* from God.

Firstly, we read that the prophecies of Ezekiel concurred with the eighteenth year of king Josiah’s reign; an addition that serves to comment on the text and demonstrates the scribe’s familiarity with the larger

³⁸ In 1:8 the text “[And they had the hands of a man under their wings] on their four sides” is added in the margins in the Sinai manuscript while it is left out in the Oxford copy. A source passage in 1:14-15 is rendered twice with minor deviation in Sin. Ar. 1: “And the beasts ran and did not [wa-lā] turn {and} as the appearance of lightening. And I saw the beasts, and see, wheels that ran and did not [wa-lam yakun] turn {and} as the appearance of lightening. And I watched the beasts, and see, wheels on the earth”. In the Oxford manuscript, parts of Ez. 1:13-14 corresponding to the Syriac text “and the fire was shining and lightning went forth from it. And the beasts were running” are left out. Parts of this text are excluded in the Septuagint.

³⁹ In line with the Septuagint, the Oxford copy renders Ez. 1:25-26 into (the excluded passages in italics) “and there was a voice [above] the firmament that was over their heads, *as they stood, they let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone*”.

⁴⁰ Cf. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā’il al-Jāḥiẓ*, 334-35. Such omissions are not as common in Christian Arabic translations as they are in Jewish literature but they do exist. Cf. Hjälm, “20.4.8 Arabic Translations”.

⁴¹ For instance, in Ez. 1:19 the cursive text in the *Vorlage* is omitted in the source text: “And when the beasts went *the wheels went with them; and when the beasts were lifted up* on the earth, the wheels were lifted up with them.

biblical corpus. Secondly, the structure of the biblical narrative is clarified in the Arabic target text. Here the addition of “says Ezekiel the Prophet” marks the shift from the narrative voice in third person to direct speech in first person, a shift which in the source text is rather abrupt. Thirdly, various explanative and/or embellishing additions are made in the Arabic translation. The source text passage “I saw a sight from God” is rendered “I saw a *stunning sight: a vision was revealed to me* from God”.⁴² Similar but shorter additions of the second and third kinds appear all through the seven first verses. For instance, another swift and unmarked shift of speaker occurs in Ez. 1:3. Here the Syriac text “and the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel [...] and the hand of the Lord was there upon me” is rendered “God revealed [a vision] to Ezekiel [...] *and he said: the hand of the Lord was upon me there*” as if to clarify the structure of the text. Several additions also serve to clarify the content. In Ez. 1:7 the Syriac passage “*And their feet [were] straight*” is rendered into Arabic as “*but their feet were straight like the feet of men.*” In the same example the clause is joined to the former by the Syriac conjunction *wə* “and” in the source text but by *wa-lākin* “but” in the Arabic translation since the two clauses are in a contrastive relation. Examples of a similar kind, i.e. that serve to clarify the syntactic relations between clauses, occur regularly throughout the chapter.

In sum, Sin. Ar. 1 and the Oxford copy represent the same version of Ezekiel but the first seven verses in the latter went through, or had already gone through, a revision process which is characterized primarily by its many clarifying and/or embellishing additions. The difference in approach is also noticeable in how a stylistic dilemma may be resolved. Whereas there is a tendency to omit stylistically burdensome elements in the Sinai manuscript, such passages are often solved with additions in the Oxford copy. Compare the rendition of Ez. 1:5 rendered “And this was their appearance: like the likeness of a man” in the Syriac source text, with that in Sin. Ar. 1 “the likeness of men”, and that in the Oxford copy “And this was *the description of their appearance: it was similar to men.*”

The differences between Sin. Ar. 1 and the Oxford copy are few compared to their combined difference from the other manuscripts, which we will now examine.

Our third text, Ms Sinai Ar. 9 (henceforth Sin. Ar. 9), is dated to the thirteenth century. the first seven verses in the latter transmitted in this manuscript represent the same text attested to in the Oxford manuscript with only minor deviations. That is, it retains most minor omissions and additions attested in it, including the commenting extension in Ez. 1:1. On a few occasions, however, additions are removed or added, the word order may be changed and the grammar is occasionally brought in line with the standards of literary Arabic, though it generates some non-Classical features of its own.⁴³ On specific occasions, when the former two copies exhibit a minor influence from the Septuagint and/or the Syrohexapla, the text in Sin. Ar. 9 is brought into line with the Syriac Peshiṭta (given that such renderings were not part of the original composition). These kinds of alterations mainly concern proper names.⁴⁴ For instance, the name of the river by which Ezekiel receives his vision appears as *hyr* [حبر] in the Oxford copy and as *jwbr*⁴⁵ [جوبر] in Sin. Ar. 1. Firstly, this indicates that their *Vorlage* was an unpointed Arabic text. Namely, the consonantal body (*rasm*) of the letters *jīm*, *khā'* and *hā'* is identical and dots have to be added to indicate which sound is intended, a task otherwise left to the copyist. The same is true for *yā* and *bā'* that also share the same *rasm*. Normally, vowel letters are inserted to indicate long sounds in Arabic. However, the length of a vowel may be understood differently, especially in foreign words, and sometimes a vowel letter may be inserted, whether or not it represents a long or a short sound. This combination of common phenomena most likely explains why we in one copy find *hyr* and in another *jwbr*. Secondly, and our main point here, the Septuagint reads *Khobar* and the Syrohexapla *khūbr* thus, it appears that this was the form of the name known to the original translator who intended the consonants to be read *khbr* [خبر], though these were later copied into *jwbr* and *hyr*, for reasons explained above. In Sin. Ar. 9, however, a different *rasm*, *kāf*, is selected as the first consonant and the name is rendered *kbr*. This cannot be

⁴² Cf. “Alternative translations” in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 181-99.

⁴³ So-called Middle Arabic features are common in Christian Arabic texts, see Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic*, as well as in documents composed by various religious communities, see Hopkins, *Studies*.

⁴⁴ It is not uncommon that proper names are rendered by the form known to the translator or copyist rather than according to the main *Vorlage* used for the composition, cf. Hjälm, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 264-65.

⁴⁵ Or *jwbn*. In that case, the final letter *rā'* was mistaken for *nūn* when the manuscript was copied. These two letters are easily confused in early Arabic scripts where they are kept apart only by the length of their so-called tail.

explained as a result of the copying process, but suggests that another *Vorlage* was consulted, most likely the Peshiṭṭa where the name is featured as *kbr* (cf. Hebr. *kāḇār*).⁴⁶ In a similar vein, the rendition “the captivity of *Joakim* king of Judah” in Ez. 1:2 is attested to both in Sin. Ar. 1 and in the Oxford copy. This rendering reflects the Septuagint and the Syrohexapla, although there the epithet “king” is not included. In contrast, Sin. Ar. 9 renders “the captivity of *Jehoiachin* king of Judah” like the Syriac Peshiṭṭa and the Masoretic text.

From Ez. 1:8 onwards, the copyist of Sin. Ar. 9 used what appears to be a completely different recension. The techniques applied in this second version concur with the approach taken in Ez. 1:1-7, first detected in the Oxford copy. Additions that serve to clarify the content of the text are systematically used as are adverbs inserted in the target text in order to increase the vividness of the narrative. For instance, in Ez. 1:10, the concise biblical rendition “And the likeness of their faces [was] the face of a man and the face of a lion on the right side” is unpacked and rendered “and their faces were *according to this description*: on the right side like the face of a lion and a face of a man.” In Ez. 1:21 the concise Syriac text “and when they went, they went, and when they stood, they stood” is supplied with grammatical subjects so that it becomes more clear who did what: “and when *the beasts* went, they went *with them*, [and when] they stood, *the wheels* stood *with them*.” Additions of similar kinds appear in almost every verse. In Ez. 1:9 the Syriac source text renders “and when they went they went straight forward and they did not turn.” Grammatically, “they” refers to the beasts (fem. pl.) in the Syriac text, not to the “wings” or “faces” (masc. pl.). However, the metaphor is apparently obscure and in the Septuagint the word “faces” is inserted and the passage rendered: “And *the faces* of the four turned not when they went.” The Syrohexapla reflects the shorter Greek rendition but replaces “faces” with “wings”, as noted in the margins.⁴⁷ In Sin. Ar. 9, the text unit is expanded and rendered “and when they went they went in front of them *quickly* [*sarāt amāmaha sayran musarra’an*] and they did not turn *and they did not return behind them*.” Since both “wings”, “faces” and “beasts” are grammatically rendered in the feminine singular in Arabic, the references are not fully clear. However, by the insertion of “quickly” it appears that the scribe painted a picture where the wings fluttered quickly in front of the beasts. The source text unit “and they did not turn” is rendered into two text units in the target text “and they [the beasts?] did not turn and they [the wings?] did not return behind them.” The first rendition is a faithful reflection of the *Vorlage* “turn” whereas the second rendition may be inserted in order to support the translator’s interpretation of the metaphor.⁴⁸

Ez. 1:11 features yet another example of when the source text is slightly altered apparently as a means of making immediate sense of the biblical narrative. Here the Syriac text “and their faces and their wings were stretched upward” is rendered “and their wings were spread over the faces.”

Besides clarifying and ornamental additions, the verb *kāna* “was” is frequently added to the target text as a means of establishing the time reference which is understood from the context in the concise biblical language.

Only a few omissions are attested in this rendition of Ezekiel 1. In Ez. 1:15 a passage in the source text is left out in Sin. Ar. 9 so that the Syriac “and I was watching and behold, wheels were on the ground *next to the four beasts*” is rendered “and I was watching. See they had wheels on the ground.” Whether the omission results from the copying process or for the sake of the metaphor, is difficult to say. In Ez. 1:26 the text is abbreviated for the sake of style and no semantic information is lost. Here the Syriac text “and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness and the appearance of a man was upon it above” is rendered into Arabic as “and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness of a man who was sitting.”

Finally, we will turn to our last manuscripts, Mss Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C 58 inf. dated 1226 and London, BL, Or. 5918 dated to the fourteenth century. The two manuscripts contain the same text with very little variation. This rendition is especially important since it represents the text attributed to Pethiōn which was transmitted in a number of copies. It turns out that this text represents that in Sin. Ar. 9 with only

⁴⁶ Because of the so called *begadkefat* laws in Hebrew and Syriac, the sound /k/ is best represented by *kāf* in Arabic.

⁴⁷ Ceriani (ed.), *Codex syro-hexaplaris*, fol. 152v.

⁴⁸ Cf. “Alternative translations” in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 181-99. There is not a widespread use of this feature in the limited corpus under our scope but some examples are evident.

minor deviations. Some of these deviations correspond to renderings in the Oxford copy, others slightly change the grammar. A few independent renderings, perhaps connected to the copying process, appear as well. For instance, in the source text unit “In the fifth day of the month, *in the fifth year* of king Jehoiachin’s captivity,” the words “in the fifth year” are left out in Ez. 1:2. The following text unit in Ez. 1:19-20: “and when the living creatures were lifted up from the ground, the wheels were lifted up with them. Wherever the spirit was to go, they went and the wheels were lifted up with them” is left out as well. Similar kinds of information likewise relating to the metaphor are omitted in Ez. 1: 21. We may assume that these passages were left out by mistake or that the scribe or the community was rather disinterested in the metaphoric part of Ezekiel 1.⁴⁹

There is a strong tendency to bring the text in line with the Septuagint, similar to what we observed in the Oxford manuscript. For instance, Ez. 1:14 which contains information about the beasts that run back and forth with the speed of lightning in the Syriac and Hebrew texts, is not included in the Septuagint. As opposed to Sin. Ar. 9, this passage is removed in the London and Milan copies. In a similar vein, the lengthy passage in Ez. 1:17 “and wherever the first one turned to go, the other went after it, and turned not” is excluded in these two copies, which is also the case in the Hebrew and Greek texts. In contrast, this passage is present in the Syriac Peshitta and in the other Arabic copies examined in this study.

Interestingly enough, the text in the Milan and London copies exhibits a certain number of similarities to the earlier texts transmitted in Sin. Ar. 1 and in the Oxford copy. For instance, the river which in the Syriac source text is named *kbr* is rendered *jwbr* in this version just as in Sin. Ar. 1. In Ez. 1:4, the Syriac source text renders “a storm wind came out *of the north*, a great cloud.” Seemingly in order to create harmony between “a storm wind” and “a great cloud” the additional phrase *min al-gharb/maghrib* “from the west” is attested to in the Oxford manuscript and in the second version: “a storm wind approaching *from the north*, a great cloud *from the west*.”⁵⁰

To summarize our findings so far: At least two different versions of Ezekiel circulated by the fourteenth century. The first version is represented by Sin. Ar. 1 and the Oxford copy and the second by Sin. Ar. 9 and the Milan and London manuscripts, i.e. a version attributed to a certain Pethiōn. The distinction between the two Arabic versions becomes clear from the eighth verse onwards. Whereas the first recension represents a rather literal rendition allowing only for minor omissions and a few additions for the sake of the target language, the second one exhibits a high number of additions and alterations that serve to make the content easily understandable but also to improve the style and coherence of the concise biblical narrative.

As to the first seven verses, the textual relation is more obscure. Here the Oxford copy, Sin. Ar. 9 and the Milan and London copies represent a rendition which is different from that in Sin. Ar. 1. Subsequent to a closer study, it appears that the latter four represent a revision of the text in Sin. Ar. 1 where most notably, there are additions of the kind observed throughout Sin. Ar. 9 and the Milan and London manuscripts. In other words, Sin. Ar. 1 represents one distinct version and Sin Ar. 9 and the Milan and London copies represent another distinct version (with some alteration) whereas in the Oxford copy two different texts are used. Perhaps the copyist of the earliest representative of the second version started to revise the first version but in verse eight decided to translate the text directly from the original. This would explain why the first seven verses reflect a revised form of the first version altered by the same kinds of addition techniques as those observed in the second version. However, we cannot rule out that the first seven verses in Sin. Ar. 1 on the one hand and in the other manuscripts on the other, in fact represent two completely different renditions which just happen to be similarly phrased. Before we conclude the study, let us make a more

⁴⁹ A minor portion of this verse is also excluded in the Oxford copy, as noted above. The exclusion in Ez. 1:25 may be a copying mistake. Here the Syriac, following the Hebrew, renders “And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads; and when they stopped, they let down their wings.” This passage is rendered in a short version in the Septuagint “And lo! a voice from above the firmament” but completely excluded in the London copy. However, also the second part of a conditional sentence is excluded in the verse before, thus the Arabic text seems incomplete: “when they stood and I saw above the firmament” and appears to result from a copy mistake.

⁵⁰ Compare Vaccari, “Le versioni arabe dei profeti” (1922), 416-20; and Frank, “The Jeremias of Pethion” where similar observations are made. However, “Pethiōn’s” texts should be carefully compared before we can reach a firm conclusion regarding the relationship between them.

detailed comparison also on the lexical and syntactical level with the aim of tracing indications of whether or not the first seven verses are governed by different techniques from those of the rest of the corpus in the second version. We will first analyze the clearly different parts, i.e. Ez. 1:8-28.

Semitic languages share a multitude of sound-similar roots and it is of little surprise that a translator from one Semitic language to another selects a cognate or another root that sounds similar to that in the source language without spending much thought on it. We find a high number of sound-similar roots in both recensions. However, none of the translators aimed at attaining to formal equivalence between source and target text to the degree we find in Yefet ben 'Eli's Bible translations. In 1:13, Sin. Ar. 1 selects the non-cognate option *bahā'im* "beasts" instead of *ḥayawān(āt)* "animals, beasts", which is the case in the other Arabic renditions, to represent the Syriac *ḥaywātā* with the same meaning. Yet, the overall tendency to strive for structural literalism is higher in the first recension than in the second one where the translator is more target-oriented and motivated to produce a text written in clear and proper Arabic. For instance, in 1:9 the Syriac *luḡbalhēn* "in front of them" is rendered into *muqābilahum* with the same root and meaning in Sin. Ar. 1 but into *amāmahu* with the same meaning but a different root in the second version. The Syriac word *mazharā* "shine" in 1:13 is rendered into *tazharu* by the same root and meaning in Sin. Ar. 1 but by *talma'u* "shine, flash" in the second version. In 1:21 the Syriac *qāymān* "standing [still]" is rendered by the same root *qumna* "stood" in the first recension but with *waqafat* "stood still" in the second. Some of the sound-similar roots in Sin. Ar. 1 are exchanged in the Oxford copy. In 1:11 the Syriac clause *tartēn naqifān* "two were connected" is rendered *ithnayn mutaffaqayn* in Sin. Ar. 1 "two were in agreement" seemingly motivated by sound-similarity whereas the Oxford copy renders *ithnayn mukhtalifayn* "two were different," apparently a copying mistake. In the Milan and London copies it is rendered into *janāḥān multaṣiqān* "two wings were connected." Here the source word "two" is replaced by the dual form of the word "wings" as preferred in literary Arabic. Thus, the focus here is on the target language rather than on formal similarity with the Syriac source text. The last example brings our attention to the treatment of syntactic constructions in the two recensions. Ez. 1:18 makes an illustrative example. The source text may be literally rendered into English as "and height is for their rims and they could see and/for their rims were full of eyes, the four of them were surrounded." The first Arabic version retains the word order and structure of the Syriac source text and the first clause is rendered: *wa-irtifā' kāna li-ḡuhūrihim* "and height was for their rear parts." In contrast, in the second version the word order is changed into *wa-kānat ḡuhūruhā 'āliya* "and their rear parts were elevated." Both recensions use the verb *kāna* "was" to establish a past time reference but other than that the first rendition is literal whereas the second is target-oriented. The last word in the Syriac sentence *methkarkān* "were surrounded" is featured in the *ethpə'el* form which has a passive meaning. In Sin. Ar. 1 this word is reflected by the tenth verb form and rendered *istadarna* and in the first form *tadūr* in the second version. The two forms have the meaning "revolve" in Arabic and so both options are faithful to the semantics of the source text but the first option is faithful also to its form. Although we find contradicting examples, the first version tends in general to be oriented towards the source text and the second one towards the target language.

Let us see what we can glean from the first seven verses. Ez. 1:1-2a is left out in Sin. Ar. 1 and we will start with verse 3, disregarding additions and omissions and passages where the text is identical, and concentrating on word order and sound-similarity in passages where the renditions differ. In verse 3 the Syriac text is rendered *həwā petḡāmeḥ dā-māryā 'alā* [Ezekiel] "the word of [him] the Lord was upon." In Sin. Ar. 1 this passage is rendered *kāna qawl min ar-rabb 'alā* "a speech from the Lord was upon" which closely reflects the verb form and the preposition in the Syriac text whereas small adjustments are made in the phrase "the word of [him]." The Oxford manuscript renders *awḥā allāh ilā* "God revealed to" which neither reflects the structure of the source text nor is sound-similarity reached regarding the preposition. In the end of the same verse, the Syriac renders *həwāth 'alay [tammān] ideh dā-māryā* "the hand of [him] the Lord was upon me [there]" which is rendered *ḥallat 'alay yad ar-rabb* "the hand of the Lord descended upon me." *ḥallat* is selected instead of the formal equivalent *kānat* but the word order closely follows the Syriac text. In the Oxford copy this passage is rendered *[qāla in] yad ar-rabb [allāh] ḥallat 'alay* which displays the same words as Sin. Ar. 1 but they are arranged in a different word order, as preferred in literary Arabic. In Ez. 1:4 the Syriac rendering "and I saw [lit. was seeing] a strong wind

coming [ʿātyā]” is rather literally rendered in Sin. Ar. 1 “and I saw [raʿitu] a strong wind coming [taʿtī].” For some reason the verb is placed after the direct object in the Oxford copy,⁵¹ and the non-cognate root *muqbil* is selected for the Syriac ʿātyā with the same meaning. In 1:5 the Syriac *bəṇay nāšā* “sons of men” is literally rendered into *abnāʿ an-nās* in Sin. Ar. 1 but only into *an-nās* in the Oxford copy. The word order in “and four faces to one” in 1:6 is retained in Sin. Ar. 1 whereas it is rendered “each one [had] four faces” in the Oxford manuscript.

The question how to understand the identical parts of these two versions remains and it may be helpful to widen the comparison through including some additional Arabic translations. The two texts share a certain number of lexical choices that are not found in *the Biblia Sacra Arabica*, al-ʿAlam’s translations or in the modern van Dyke Bible. For instance the selection of the word *ḥallat* “descend” in Ez. 1:3 discussed above, is rendered *kānat* in the other translations regardless of *Vorlage* dependence. In 1:4 the Syriac *garbyā* “northern” is closely reflected as *al-jirbī* in the manuscripts under the scope of this study whereas the variant *al-jirbiyyā*⁵² is selected in al-ʿAlam’s translation and *ash-shamāl* in *the Biblia Sacra Arabica* and in van-Dyke. Because of such a lexical affinity, I would not rule out the option that the seven first verses in the most ancient translation have been thoroughly revised or at least consulted in what we have identified as the second version. In fact, a brief study of Ez. 2 and Ez. 48 also shows that the two versions share a comparatively high number of glosses and formulations. Thus, at this point we cannot exclude the possibility that the second version constitutes a reworking of the first and that some sections were revised more extensively than others.

Concluding Remarks

In the present study, we have examined five manuscripts containing primarily Syriac-based Arabic translations of Ezekiel. The earliest dated witness to Ezekiel is transmitted in Sin. Ar. 1. In general, this represents a literal rendition that allows for minor deviations, usually omissions, for the sake of clarity and style. The archetype of Sin. Ar. 1 was probably produced in the early ninth or late eighth century. The next manuscript, Ms Oxford, Bodl., Fraser 257, basically transmits the same text as that in Sin. Ar. 1 but excludes some material which is not part of the Septuagint. The first seven verses in this rendition represent either a completely different recension or a thorough revision of the earlier attested text. Most notably, a large number of additions are incorporated into the target text.

The third manuscript in our study, Sin. Ar. 9, exhibits the first seven verses according to the (revised) version in the Oxford copy, but some proper names in it are corrected according to the Peshittā. The remaining text represents what appears to be a completely different version of Ezekiel where the translator made substantial use of clarifying additions with the intention of making the biblical narrative immediately understandable to the target audience. It is clear that the translator also took into consideration questions of style since some textual extensions serve the purpose of embellishing the text in a way typical for literary Arabic compositions. The techniques attested to in the second version resemble those observed in the first (revised) part of the Oxford copy. The motivation to attain structural equivalence is higher in the first version, which often mirrors the word order of the source text and strive for sound-similarity, than in the second.⁵³ However, sound-similar roots are comparatively common in the second version as well.

Finally, Mss Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C 58 inf. and London, BL, Or. 5918, which contain the same text with few deviations, were analyzed. The two manuscripts transmit the same text as Sin. Ar. 9 but as opposed to the latter, it is partially revised in line with the Greek Septuagint. The table below shows which version(s) is contained in the various manuscripts.

⁵¹ This is not the case in Sin. Ar. 9 or the Milan and London copies and does not follow the preferences of literary Arabic.

⁵² A rare form of the word denoting the northern wind, see Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* vol. 2, 403.

⁵³ It should be mentioned that sometimes certain principles are followed more thoroughly in the beginning of a translation than in the rest, cf. Hjälml, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 239n4.

Sin. Ar. 1 Oxford, Fraser 257		Sin. Ar. 9 Milan, Ambros., C 58 inf.	London, Or. 5918
Ez. 1:1-7	Version 1	Version 2	Version 2, partly adjusted to the LXX
Ez. 1:8-28	Version 1, partly adjusted to the LXX		Version 2, partly adjusted to the LXX

At this stage, we cannot identify the most original text of the second version but it is clear that the text was extensively revised according to different principles. In light of these findings, one must ask to which stage in the transmission process this Pethiōn is to be connected. Was he the original translator of the version exhibited in Sin. Ar. 9 or in the more homogenous copies represented by the Milan and London manuscripts which also paid attention to the Septuagint? Or was he the translator of the early text exhibited in Sin. Ar. 1 of which only a remnant has survived in the version(s) associated with his name? Naturally, a more thorough study may throw light on the situation. In fact, another manuscript contained in the Bodleian libraries in Oxford, Ms. Arch. Seld. A. 67 dated 1358, contains yet another version of Ezekiel. This text appears to be independent from the two earlier versions studied in the present article but it exhibits a certain affinity with the first version in particular. Mss Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Bible 82 and 87 dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries reflects the text in Sin. Ar. 9. Thus, in contrast to the more standardized version of Jeremiah transmitted in these manuscripts,⁵⁴ it appears that the Christian Arabic rendition of Ezekiel continued to be revised with different sets of translation techniques, stylistic preferences and *Vorlagen* in mind.

The many addition techniques and alterations observed in the second version of Ezekiel are noteworthy since it concerns a semi-standardized version of a sacred text. However, translation techniques adopted in a composition should be understood in relation to the function of the text.⁵⁵ In our case, it is doubtful whether the Arabic translations were composed with the intention of replacing renditions of the Bible in the traditional liturgical languages. Instead, our translations are situated in the border-land of translation, exegetical commentary and reworkings of the biblical narrative with the purpose of giving it a relevant and immediate meaning while the original text was still in use.

Because of the complementing function Arabic Bible translations served in the Middle Ages, there was no need to compose a complete Bible where the various books were governed by the same stylistic norms and techniques. While some works, especially New Testament texts or other biblical texts frequently used in liturgy, are rather faithful to the biblical source texts, a large number of especially Old Testament texts exhibit numerous omissions and additions as well as harmonizing and contextual emendations. It is interesting to note that the strong preference for literalism which was so prominent in the ancient world, never really caught on in the Arabic-speaking milieu, as pointed out by Sebastian Brock.⁵⁶ Not only does the creation of mirror-translations safeguard the structural level of the source text which may also convey meaning, but it furthermore demonstrates the translator's skill in understanding the inner dynamics of the source language.⁵⁷ As demonstrated above, the Jewish Karaite Yefet ben 'Eli still adhered to such principles in the tenth century. However, this approach often results in a clumsy target language which is difficult to understand and such texts were in principle avoided among Arabic-speaking Christians. Brock connects this state to the high esteem of the Arabic language in the Near Eastern milieu.⁵⁸ In addition, it should be pointed out that as long as texts in the traditional sacred language(s) were in use, there was no urgent need to reflect the structural level of the source text in the target text or even its immediate meaning. Instead, the Arabic translators could place a strong emphasis on the logical and commonsensical level of the biblical narrative at the expense of its poetic and mystical dimensions.

Although the Arabic translations initially served a complementing function vis-à-vis the source texts, they played an increasingly important role among ordinary Christians and among those who read and

⁵⁴ See the study by Frank, "The Jeremiah of Pethion" and that by Hjälms, "The Major Prophets in Arabic."

⁵⁵ Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, 152-53.

⁵⁶ Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique", 70-79.

⁵⁷ Polliack, "Concepts of Scripture", 80-88.

⁵⁸ Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique", 75.

studied continuous versions of the Bible. Subsequent to the invention of the printing press, extant copies of Arabic Bible texts were collected, sometimes revised and printed in Polyglots and in missionary Bibles. Thereby these ancient versions came to be disseminated in both Western and Eastern societies. Due to their many non-literal features, Arabic Bible translations rarely serve as useful witnesses to ancient Bible manuscripts. However, they provide us with valuable information how the Bible was understood and made relevant in a Near Eastern context and recoded in Arabic, a language whose foremost connection was with the Holy Scriptures of a rivaling religious creed.⁵⁹

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